

Travellers in plan to move to next field

Council-owned land could be 'solution'

Laura Brown and Joshua Farrington

laura.brown@gazettenews.co.uk

DALE Farm travellers resigned to the fact they will be evicted from the site they have occupied illegally for years are looking to secure a neighbouring plot of land.

Traveller representatives plan to submit a formal application to Basildon District Council over the coming weeks, requesting that land behind commercial premises along the A127 in Gardiners Lane South is turned into a makeshift camp.

The site had been earmarked for more permanent housing.

Spokesman Grattan Puxon said: "Richard Sheridan, the leader of the Dale Farm Residents' Association, has asked for a meeting with the council to discuss the possibility of developing a mobile home on the site.

"We are preparing to put in an outline planning application.

"It is a big site over there and we hope the council will welcome the idea of doing this."

The travellers from Dale Farm

own their current site, in Crays Hill, but are living there illegally because it is protected land and they do not have planning permission.

Mr Puxon said of the new site: "The key is that it is not green belt land and could provide a sensible solution while the council tries to provide their required number of pitches."

Mr Puxon said there are 25 families at Dale Farm who have been identified as being most in need of housing should the planned eviction go ahead and he hopes other families might also be able to move onto the site temporarily.

Designated

Traveller advocate Malcolm Tully said: "It's a council-owned site that has been designated for houses.

"There are plans to build 3,500 homes there but they don't have the money to proceed and it has been put off for five years.

"The council is required by the Government to create 62 pitches so this gives them the opportunity to do that."

Dale Farm traveller Marianne McCarthy said she would prefer to have a permanent site to move to but would be happy to set up home in Gardiners Lane South on a temporary basis while other arrangements are made.

"I think it would be a very good idea and would give us somewhere to go rather than being kicked out," she said.

"But the council doesn't seem to want to listen to our problems. They are just interested in getting us off and passing the situation on to another council when it's their job to find us somewhere."

However, Len Gridley, who lives next to Dale Farm, dismissed the idea. He said: "It's a no-go. Why should they be rewarded for breaking the law?"

Basildon council leader Tony Ball confirmed the council had received correspondence and was awaiting a formal application.

"The council has an obligation to consider all applications and follow the correct procedure," he said. "We continue to work with the travellers to reach a peaceful settlement and a forced eviction remains a last resort."

Team pushes boat out for heroes' fund

A SIX-strong team of fundraisers have tackled the Thames tide.

The Brightside Six, led by Billericay's Joe Lane, 44, completed a 100-mile journey up the Thames in a rowing boat in support of Help For Heroes.

The trip started at Southend's iconic pier and from there they

travelled upstream through London arriving at Windsor town roughly 24 hours later.

The destination was inspired by a team member's son, who serves with the Household Cavalry at Windsor.

"We had to train for six months," Joe said. "I was the only

member who had ever rowed before. On the day, it was harsh."

The team all have links to Brightside Primary School, in Billericay, and have previously helped the school raise money for a minibus.

If you would like to donate, visit www.justgiving.com/h4hl00.